

Review

Impact of violent images in Chutti television

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The paper presents the impact of violent images in Chutti TV on children. Chutti TV is a Tamil channel which has wide viewership among children in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. It examines the relationship between exposure to absorption of violent images and its understanding among children. It also concludes that, it is hard to find appropriate relationship between depiction of violent images and violent behaviour among children. Specific vulnerabilities and of course the way of living finds a place in the reasons catering to the violent behaviour among children. The direct relationship between the violent images and the viewers is taken into consideration related to nightmares, restlessness and attitudes towards such types of images. The study suggests the need for media education in school, proper guidance of parents and also basic ethics for the production organizations.

Key words: Ethics, media, violent images, children, behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

"If you came and you found a strange man... teaching your kids to punch each other, or trying to sell them all kinds of products, you'd kick him right out of the house, but here you are; you come in and the TV is on, and you don't think twice about it," said Jerome Singer (2010). A study of children's television programmed in Asia, including India, conducted by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC) in the late 1990s revealed the predominance of animation programmed and foreign programming in the fare offered to children by Doordarshan and private broadcasters (indigenous and transnational) telecasting to Indian audiences. Shows on children's channels are a mix of adventure, action, comedy and sports and they also attempt to add distinctive features with an educative value. Still, violent and adventure-based programmed are dominant on all channels. Even indigenous productions are attempting to ape the stunts and violence in mostly mythology-based serials such as "Ghatothkach, Prahlad, Siva, Dashavatar, my friend Ganesha, Hanuman, Ravan Mahayodhya and Veer Yodhya Prithviraj Chauhan". An analysis of the content of the channels shows that most of these programmes are of foreign origin although, Indian content is available and the top-rated children's

show is "Chhota Bheem" on Pogo. Clearly, original Indian programmes and cartoons have a big market today, but they still constitute less than 20% of the content on most channels targeted at children. Walt Disney has tapped this potential with 40% original Indian programmes and cartoons. Most content for children even today is foreign (American, Japanese, Korean and British) dubbed in local language. As indigenous content is inadequate to fill the slots, the gap is filled with indiscriminate imported content. While this trend is not new, improved dubbing techniques have certainly helped in reaching out to a larger audience.

Pogo produced successful research-based content with the introduction of Sesame Street (Gali Gali Sim Sim). This was an important turning point. Since then, original programming in foreign formats – very similar to our general entertainment channels – is also being produced. Family viewing dominates Indian television audience; hence a large number of children based programmes (reality and serials) are on popular entertainment channels. Unfortunately, most of these programmes continue to rely on a great deal of stereotyping, basically with violent content. Regional channels such as Chutti TV for children though popular, mostly depend on foreign cartoons and animation-based programmes dubbed in local languages. Chutti TV is a Tamil channel which has wide viewership among children in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. They also have significant film-based programmes, especially in South India. The television

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content and its use by children, about television's influence on children's attitudes, knowledge, behaviour and about the appropriate public policy toward children's television have been central to the discussion of this medium throughout its existence.

Families have accepted television as a valuable member of the family since its development as a commercial vehicle (Liebert and Sprafkin, 1988). In many homes, the family members arrange their schedules based on the television programmed schedule. Even their furniture, particularly the dining table, would be arranged around the television set. "Television viewing is a direct option for the children. Concerns arise on the themes and images children view on television. Many images are far from real-life experience (Potts and Henderson, 1991). Programmes for children are mostly depicted with violent images. Positive or negative attitude of the images impact among the children is present. Physical injuries and temporary consequences are portrayed in children television programmes (Potts and Henderson, 1991). In many cases, the humorous context in which injuries are depicted increases the likelihood that children will imitate the behaviour, for e.g, *The Adventures of Jackie Chan* dubbed in the Tamil language and telecast in Chutti TV. Though children are exposed to violence, in other ways apart from television, only television is said to provide the most excessive expressions of violence. A child spends more time with TV than he or she spends talking to parents, playing with peers, or reading books. TV time usurps family time, play time, and the reading time that could promote language development. Each year children read less and less and watch television more and more, despite watching TV being a passive event. Children in lower socio-economic families spend more time viewing television. Moreover, children in Tamil Nadu are too vulnerable to the violent images depicted in Chutti TV.

Violence is always involved in children programmes. The programmes require at least a fist-fight to develop plot and storyline for any children series. A study released by the Centre for Media and Public Affairs (1999) states that though television shows a lot of violence, it rarely shows its outcome. "The authors found that despite the high volume of televised violence, viewers rarely see it causing adverse effects," states the report. *The Adventures of Jackie Chan* is one of the series telecast in Chutti TV that involves a high end entertainment and are taking the television ratings by storm. This show, along with others of its nature such as *Max Steel* and *He-Man* are extremely controversial in nature. Situations portrayed on the television screen of these series do have an impact on the children audience. These shows have become consistently more cartoon violent in content that it has caused certain concern with parents. Children are always hooked to cartoon entertainment so easily. Various channels to mention are

Pogo, Cartoon Network, Disney and particularly Chutti TV falling in line. Even in the slum areas of India, a faint glow of the flickering TV screen is always visible. The children are gripped much that they are ready to do anything to have a view of their favourite cartoon channels and programmes. Initially, children channels were only to those who can understand English and relate to a particular lifestyle. There are only limited programmes for children but later after the advent of Chutti TV other channels too turned to Tamil translated versions attracting the children in Tamil Nadu.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some experts who track violence in television programming, like George Gerbner (1990), define violence as the act (or threat) of injuring or killing someone, independent of the method used or the surrounding context. Accordingly, Gerbner includes cartoon violence in his dataset. But others, like University of Laval professors Guy Paquette and Jacques de Guise, specifically exclude cartoon violence from their research because of its comical and unrealistic presentation. Action scenes, which are usually part of media violence, seize the viewer's attention and create an unusual interest in the happening epically among males. At the same time, people tend to react more aggressively in a state of arousal. This explains the reason for higher aggression among frustrated or angered viewers, as Zillmann (1971) explains in his excitation transfer theory. Other researchers have investigated the effect of long-term exposure to extremely violent images. The impact on media violence on anxiety has also been analyzed. Some researchers have demonstrated in longitudinal studies that the frequent depiction of the world as threatening and dangerous leads to more fearful and cautious attitudes towards the actual environment we live in.

Cultural studies have discussed the role of the cultural construction of meaning. The decoding and interpretation of an image depend on traditions and conventions. This explains that an aggressive picture may be "read" differently by different people related to their traditional and convention. Groebel (1998) has formulated the compass theory that depends on already existing experiences, social control and the cultural environment. According to him, media content offers an orientation, a frame of reference that determines the direction of one's own behaviour. Viewers do not necessarily adapt simultaneously to what they have observed, but they measure their own behaviour in terms of distance to the perceived media models.

The influence of television as a learning mechanism is considered significant particularly upon children in developing countries like India. Traditionally, children

were socialized by parents, peers, religious and educational institutions (Signorielli, 1990; 2001), however, many studies have shown the mass media, especially television, plays an important role in the socialization process for children today (Berry and Mitchell-Kernan, 1982; Davidson, Yasuna and Tower, 1979; Levinson, 1975; Swan, 1998). Specifically, Gerbner and colleagues call television a “centralized system of storytelling” and have noted “it has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information of otherwise heterogeneous populations” (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli, 1994).

To the extent that television dominates individuals’ “sources of entertainment and information, continued exposure to its messages is likely to reiterate, confirm and nourish leading to cultivate own values and perspectives” (Gerbner et al., 2002). Children’s understanding of what is ‘real’ on television clearly needs to be related more generally to the development of their understanding of what is real in the everyday world. It is generally accepted that media use is an influential contributor to children’s development. Specifically, violent media use can have negative influence on children’s development. A large body of evidence exists on children’s violent media use and its negative effects. Television has been called one of the most common, constant and vivid learning environments (Signorielli, 1990). For many years, researchers have been investigating the potential effects of television consumption on society and specifically on children (Greenberg and Reeves, 1976; Zuckerman et al., 1980).

Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out whether the violent images telecast in Chutti TV have an impact on children.
- (ii) To know the influence of Chutti TV in studies.

Findings

A part of the study revealed the activities that children indulged in other than TV viewing – reading books, school work, pursuing hobbies, listening to music, computer games, net surfing, sports, spending time with family and friends and going to theatres to watch movies. In many homes, the entire family is before television watching serials. Though, the personal computer has carved out a niche for itself in many homes, it is the television that remains the prime entertainer. Many parents expressed that most cartoons are violent. Though, the intention is good in the way they try to achieve, it is not for good especially among children.

Faced with the increasing popularity of animation, which is now widely available on many channels, parents are concerned. Some are anguished by their children’s cartoon mentality and even accuse cartoons of promoting violence, deceit and disobedience. As a result of violence the emotional arousal increases with the ability of the viewer to identify with the situation. With the increasing popularity of animation, which is now widely available on cable and satellites, many parents and teachers are concerned. Parents condemn programmes such as “power rangers and Bugs bunny”.

Cartoons present fanciful situations. Children who avidly watch TV cartoons obviously do so for amusement. Cartoons do amuse. But these cartoons make a lasting impression in the minds of the viewer. Gregory Stores (2008) told the programmes listing magazine TV Times that the cartoons children watch are one source of the monsters, ghosts or wild animals that are widely present in children’s nightmares. A British government study on screen violence and film censorship acknowledges that the company in which a child views a film influences the effect it has on him or her. So, a danger for children can lie in unsupervised cartoon viewing. The same report contends that preschool children readily imitate violent actions they watch and that with some sort of emotional ‘push,’ older children about the age of five or six will engage in aggressive acts they have learned. Foreign broadcasters do admit the possibility of viewing violence on television over a period of time, may have a desensitizing or trivializing effect particularly on children, irrespective of their age. Cartoons have changed to animatronics, recently where there is no difference between the cartoon characters and the real characters. There is a striking similarity that the children are unable to distinguish between the real and the cartoon. In Max Steel, animatronics technique is used. Based on the definition of psychologists that violence is an action intended to harm, cartoon violence cannot be taken as violent images.

Parents who have been addicted to “The Bugs Bunny or Tom and Jerry” characters years ago could tune the TV to cartoons for their children. But standards have changed. With their children in mind, parents surely should seek to monitor the content of cartoons shown today, because it is not only cartoons but animatronics. Animatronics is electronic wizardry that makes cartoon fantasies look real, so real that audiences find it difficult to distinguish between cartoon and reality. The animatronic kingdom is so convincing in close up. Violent scenes presented this way possess a shocking realism. The Teenage “Mutant Ninja Turtles or the Power Rangers” are American characters considered too violent for many trans-atlantic audiences. Consequently, these programmes were telecast in the Indian sub-continent and later were translated to Tamil also. Though, these programmes were banned in America and Britain with

certain modifications they were telecast in Jetix a children's channel in India. The concern felt by parents and teachers is unexpectedly shared by some toy store owners. One store at Parrys in Chennai, capital of the Tamil Nadu state, said that it is bad sign of sales of stickers and toys of violent warriors but they could do nothing since the children ask for it and parents afford to buy it. All these series from "Tom and Jerry" to latest "Max Steel" is a marketing ploy all time to sell associated products of those programmes. With the *scenario* of having foreign programmes telecast in the native language, the total impact of the programmes is based on the attitude and culture of the child viewing it. According to British Broadcasting Corporation guidelines, which are mostly followed by many countries, TV producers should carefully consider the effects of any violence their programmes portray, including cartoons. With family welfare in mind, some parents have decided to do without TV during examinations. Others help their children weigh the pros and cons of the programmes they are interested in watching.

The problem is not the violence in the media though; it is the media's failure to show the consequences of violence. This is especially true of cartoons, toy commercials and music videos. Children often do not realize that it hurts to hit someone else because they see it all the time on TV. Everyday a cartoon character is beaten up, injured, or killed, only to return in the very next episode, good as new. As a result, children learn that there are only a few, if any repercussions, for committing violent acts. Young children do not process information in the same way as adults. Nor do they have the experience or the judgment to evaluate what they see. For example, children aged 6 - 10 may believe that most of what they see on TV is true to life. Since, they watch a lot of TV, this makes them particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of television. When children see characters on TV or in films triumph by using physical force, they begin to see violence as an acceptable way of resolving conflicts. As a result, children use physical or verbal abuse towards others on the playground or at school. Indian children on average watch four hours of television a day. Sadly, most of this viewing is violent and hundreds of studies have shown that TV violence does have an effect on kids.

The American academy of child and adolescent psychiatry states that the children due to their violence viewing become "immune to the horror of violence, gradually accept violence as a way to solve problems, imitate the violence they observe on television and identify with certain characters, victims and or victimizers". Television has become the baby-sitter of children. It seems that these days' parents just sit their children in front of the Television for hours together. Unfortunately, children seem to have a monkey-see-monkey-do mentality and tend to imitate what they see on television. The negativity portrayed by television

greatly impacts Indian youth. Violence is the best aspect of television programming used to lure viewers. Cartoons are the best example of these programmes. Viewers of all ages are infatuated with the craziness of cartoons. But the main viewers are children. Shows depicting violence as the only ways to solve a problem is of great hit. This is always the case with Poyeye. Whenever, he is faced with a challenge, he simply eats his spinach and fights his way through. Cartoon series that also shows how violence is used to solve problems are many in number.

Today in many children's cartoons, you see cartoon characters jumping, diving and falling from very high heights, then landing without being harmed. Parents seem to be happy with this as long as the cartoon does not promote sex or any kind of violence. But, these sorts of cartoons are displaying false sense of reality upon children. In Adventures of Jackie Chan, Jackie falls from high cliffs, Julie is under water till she is been rescued, most time the villain is bumped on the walls, and in "Avatar" the hero is fighting evil, amid fire lurking its tongues only on the villain character. All these hits, kicks and violence leads to the fall of the bad, but in the next episode they come back to life. More or less children who view this could feel that if one is dead they can come back again. But the truth is always hidden in these types of programmes. Being able to fall off a tall cliff or being shot with a gun in the face and walking from these incidents with barely a scratch is a false reality. This false sense of reality can really affect them. This may encourage children to try things what their favourite heroes do. Just because the cartoons children watch do not show sex or violence does not mean that they are innocent. Because of this false sense of reality children at a young age cannot tell the difference between cartoons and realism.

One of the parents while discussing stated that her child promised that he would do his homework after watching "Power Rangers" on a Saturday. The parent was waiting for the "Power Ranger" series to be over from 11 am - 3 pm since she was not aware that Saturday is a special Power Ranger day where the series will be telecast continuously. She expressed that even though the boy has likeliness towards Chutti TV programmes, he is always close to Power Rangers. Moreover, shouting irrelevantly (as series depicts) (73%), kicking and crying (68.3%) are prominent characteristics of the boy aged 10 studying in fifth standard. Nightmares where children are witnessed shouting and kicking, fisting and making noise have been noticed by 57.9% of parents. Children acting or imitating similar character on the screen (57.1%), abusing or naming others (50.8%) have been reported by the parents. As much as 16.7% of parents state that their children neglect homework or to attend tuition/school or other functions when their favourite programmes are being telecast. They also emphasize that the children are quite aware of the

timings; they know the programmed is to be telecast well in advance. As much as 70.6% of parents complain that children pressure them to buy products advertised on the screen and 70.6% say that the children pressure them to buy the toys and stickers related to the programmed or character they admire. As much as 32.5% of parents convey that their children learn new creative things from programmes and they try it at home too. Some specify that they have adorned their living room with some of the handicrafts done by their children learnt from Chutti TV.

As much as 15.1% of parents state that their children actively involved in certain programmes such as "Rum Bum Bum" a dance show which benefited them. In this context it would be apt to specify that child psychologists are warning parents to stop their children watching Jetix or cartoon channels in which the portrayals are evil looking with nasty looks and also sequences of killing, cutting the body parts, etc., which are narrated by the children in their sleep. It is found out that 82.76% of children dream of the series they have been seeing and have their own climax in their dreams. Child psychologists have advised the parents to switch off the television one hour before the children go to bed. Fear among children has also subsequently increased after the amount of television viewing has increased. This is particularly so with children's programmes where killing, slamming the door on the face, gnarly looks and tantrums increase the fear among the children. Children's cartoons are packed with many controversial topics such as violence and sexuality. These messages are not always purposely placed in the cartoon, but instead are sometimes the result of an oversensitive parent or a misunderstanding. But many parents would be shocked to learn that cartoon makers are intentionally brainwashing their children by secretly placing messages never to be deciphered by the conscious mind, but instead propagating the subconscious, into behaving in a certain way.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasis though violent images are portrayed in Chutti TV there is no relationship between these images and children's violent behaviour. Comparing to the television news channels and other adult focused channels, the violent images are not so heavy. Though in other channels mostly in native channels the programmes are culture based, series in Chutti TV do not have any moorings towards Indian culture since they are foreign productions. Also, it is very difficult to dissociate violent images from the surrounding violence in which the children are captive. The programmes that adults watch from which the children are not spared are more of violent images than Chutti TV. For some children, aggression is an expression that gives vent to their

emotions, A child could be aggressive if he or she is hyperactive, triggered or due to exposure to violence at home. This requires a need to channelize the aggression depicted in television images, so that it is expressed in a socially acceptable manner. Children should be discouraged to watch television one hour before they go to bed. Thereby, the images they have seen will have less effect when they go to bed. This could avoid children being frightened by nightmares. Restlessness sleep could also be avoided. It is better that they do not see frightening images after 8 pm. Technical features are not found in most television sets in India that could restrict certain programmes from viewing. Though, certain initiatives are taken recently to have control over the programmes, proper efforts are not been made. Though, India has the efficiency to produce animated programmes for children, financially, it is in the weaker position due to high production cost. Due to this reason channels opt for buying foreign programmes that could be dubbed and telecast.

Some methods of regulating children include: not allowing children to operate the set; allowing them to view selected programmes; allowing them to watch only after completing school work and setting fixed times for viewing. It is advisable for parents to discuss and explain reasons for restricting television viewing, to help the children learn the intellectual and moral concerns that guide the decisions of their parents. Parents should discuss the meaning of televised events with their child to avoid uncomfortable situations. In this way, parents could help their child to develop a framework for understanding and evaluating those events. Parents can protect children from excessive impact of televised images by paying attention and also watching the programmes their children watch. Children can be given time limits to spend with the television set. At times, explaining the reality results such as pain, death of certain actions will cater to necessary understanding among children. Also, getting them to know that, the acts on the screen are not reality but for only fun and entertainment which will enable them to understand better. Explanation would give better results rather than just avoiding them to see the violent images or images that might be disapproved. Enforcement of avoiding programmes might lead the habit of watching them without the knowledge of the elders or to watch even worse programmes. Peer pressure among friends and classmates may also cater to the time limits of the programmes. The parents are often scared to interfere with the interest of the children although, they are aware of the harm it does in their behaviour and attitude. Unfortunately, with a large number of TV channels with continuous programming for 24 h concentrate on subjects which attract the youngsters more specifically in advertisements to promote consumerism.

A sincere effort is required from parents and elders to

make the media organizations more responsible and accountable. Measures have to be taken from school to convince the children about the impact of programmes telecast in various channels. Discussions and seminars involving the students to discuss on programmes are good measures to make them understand the reality of programmes. A psychiatrist could do better assistance if parents come across any non-related behaviour with their children. Parents should not blame children for watching TV. Instead a tentative timetable can be prepared for television viewing. Children must be given some time to watch their favourite programmes, but parents must have an eye on the programmes that the children watch. There must be open discussions among the family members and parents that would provide a positive guidance to children. This will help them to learn to evaluate the TV programmes and what they see. No discussion should be there in front of the child on their habit of watching TV throughout the time, even if that be the case. They must be slowly steered out of this habit.

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